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SUMMARY -- FLORIDA TOURNAMENTS

Following is an evaluation of the Grassroots Challenge program in the Florida markets of Tampa, Bonita Springs, Orlando and Sarasota, along with a discussion of the areas where improvements can be made.

Advertising/Promotional Reach

Two Grassroots Challenge advertisements were placed in *Florida Tennis*. The official publication of the Florida Tennis Association, *Florida Tennis* is printed each month. It is mailed to all members of the FTA (30,000) every other (even) month of the year beginning February and distributed to all Florida tennis facilities and pro shops (5,000) every odd month.

A full-page Grassroots Challenge advertisement was placed in the January 1995 issue announcing the formation of the program and listing cities that would be host to the tournaments. A second full-page ad was placed in the February 1995 issue, mailed directly to FTA members, listing the event sites, dates, tournament director and phone numbers.

Promotional materials including posters, flyers and the entry forms were distributed by the tournament directors to tennis facilities and sporting goods outlets in each of the host cities and surrounding area. Tournament directors mailed entry forms to their member lists and league captains. A mention was also placed in the host facility's newsletter available to club members. The Bonita Bay Club contacted local newspaper and television media in the Ft. Myers and Naples areas prior to the event.

Media Coverage

Most of the media coverage of the events took place after the tournaments rather than prior to the events. The efforts of the Bonita Bay Club's publicity department drew minimal coverage in the Ft. Myers and Naples paper. The Fox TV station in Cape Corral attended the event in Bonita Springs and broadcast a clip of the event on the evening news Saturday, March 4.

Because this is a new program, much more assistance is needed from the PR representatives and the Legends promoters in order to increase exposure. The PR representatives are needed to set up interviews for Billie Jean and for story placement in all of the major newspapers in each market hosting a Grassroots Challenge event. Follow

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up with these papers with results and scores is also required. Interviews for the Charlotte and Richmond markets have already been scheduled with the major newspapers.

Participant Experience/Feedback

In each of the four markets, those women who participated agreed that it was a great opportunity, enjoyed the experience and would enter again if the tournaments were held at these sites again next year.

Participants were aware, upon entering the event, of the opportunity to compete in the regional and national tournaments as well as the benefits available to them should they advance. The women were pleased with the luncheon or reception provided at each of the sites and appreciated the t-shirt they received with their entry.

The four Grassroots Challenge qualifying tournaments for the Tampa Region took place at the following facilities with the corresponding number of entries: Bonita Bay Club in Bonita Springs, five entries in 3.5 division, eight entries in 4.5 division; Bath & Racquet Club in Sarasota, five entries in 3.5, nine entries in 4.5; Innisbrook Resort in Tarpon Springs, nine entries in 3.5, five entries in 4.5; and Orlando Fitness & Racquet Club, three entries in 3.5, six entries in 4.5.

Areas for Improvement

Although the response from participants and tournament directors was positive with regard to the experience, the number of participants at each facility did not meet the program's expectations. There are several factors to consider in evaluating these first tournaments and in planning for the remaining events.

- New Program As with any new program, exposure is extremely important. Unfortunately, the Florida events received relatively no media coverage prior to the events. A number of local newspapers have inquired about the results which is encouraging, however, an announcement of the event prior to the tournaments might have brought additional entries.

  It is critical that we utilize Billie Jean's services more effectively by scheduling phone interviews several weeks prior to the scheduled grassroots events. This will encourage pre-event media coverage and assist in providing exposure for each of the events.

  Interviews with the Spartanburg Herald Journal, Raleigh News & Observer and Norfolk Virginia Pilot have been scheduled for Billie Jean the week of March 27th.

  At two sites, comments were made by women who were watching and not participating that they were sorry they hadn't entered and would do so next year. Again, an indication that as a new program, people need to be educated about and exposed to it.

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- Timing The time of year these tournaments were staged may not have been ideal for this market. February through May/mid-June is the heavy tennis season in these areas with many established tournaments and league play as competition for this new event. Without enough lead-time, the tournaments could not be scheduled so that they did not conflict with established events. Next year we will have the proper lead-time and be able place the event on the local calendars to avoid the conflict and possibly tie-in to existing events.

- Competition
  The USTA League season begins the first weekend in March in one of these markets (Innisbrook). Most league matches are held on the weekend. The first week of League play interfered with our tournament there. In order to have avoided this scheduling conflict we would have needed to host this local event in early February. This would have been difficult due to the already condensed promotional time and limited material distribution. Moving the date later into March would still compete with League play and push the event too close to the regional tournament. Again, next year this problem will be avoided with more lead-time available to plan the events.

  In addition to the USTA Leagues, there is an established women's program sponsored by BMW that competes with the Grassroots Challenge -- not so much with regard to the time of year, but in terms of benefits provided to the participants. The BMW leagues charge a similar entry fee but also provide local players with a substantial gift bag upon entry (collared shirt, Wilson tennis shoes, tennis balls, etc.). The BMW program offers a regional tournament to local winners as well. Next year we will provide more benefits on the local level by partnering with other sponsors to provide product.

- Lead Time/Promotion Each of the tournament directors noted that additional lead time was necessary in order to attract more players. Each of the sites received many calls as a result of the *Florida Tennis* advertisement, however, the chance to get players to commit was lost because directors did not have entries to mail or distribute by that time.

  Additional time to promote is essential and had dates and sites been finalized earlier, the conflict with League play may have been avoided as it would have allowed the USTA Leagues **not** to schedule matches during the Grassroots Challenge event. Next year we will work to accomplish this.

  Because of the delays experienced, tournament directors had less than two weeks to promote the events once they received the materials. Even with an established event, two weeks is not sufficient.

- Divisions Offered After receiving the feedback from the remaining markets we will evaluate the divisions offered to determine if additional divisions should be made available.

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- Site Selection Overall the geographic areas selected in terms of their proximity to Tampa were good and the individual facilities were wise choices in each market. Innisbrook, although the nicest of the facilities, may have been too remote from the heart of Tampa. One residential club (Bonita Bay), two large public clubs (Bath & Racquet & Orlando Fitness) and one resort facility (Innisbrook) were used. In 1996, rather than a resort location, we will consider a public facility or park and recreation facility that is more central to Tampa.

We welcome any feedback or suggestions for improvement and look forward to discussing the Florida events when we meet in Tampa, April 7-9.

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